

Visualizing the Shuswap

A *Shuswap Passion* column for the Shuswap Market News

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Creating the first watershed map and poster of our region was no easy task, but thanks to help from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and assistance and support from many government agencies and other organizations and businesses; Shuswap residents can now clearly identify and understand the full extent of their home place. The project began with a funding application to the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program in early 2008. Despite being turned down for funding, we persevered and with the help of the Integrated Land Management Branch the first mock-up image of the entire watershed was created.

When the first image was created, we were surprised to see its unusual shape that roughly resembled a drop of water with an appendage to the southwest for the Salmon River drainage. And while the Shuswap extends almost as far south as Kelowna, the Okanagan extends almost as far north as Salmon Arm. In between the Salmon River and Shuswap River drainages lies the Deep Creek watershed which flows south.

Once the mock-up image of the Shuswap watershed was created, the next step was to find a volunteer geographic information system (GIS) technician to produce the final map for the poster. Thankfully, Brad Grant at Silvatech Consulting Ltd. agreed to help with the project and suggested that the GIS class at Salmon Arm Secondary also get involved, which they did under the guidance of their teacher, Noah Ralston.

Using draft text provided in part by Sarah Weaver, with the Living by Water project, the student design was the next step in the process. With the involvement of the high school class, the school district became interested and thus became a key partner in the project. A key meeting was held in Kamloops with B.C. government ministry and DFO staff, who reviewed the student design and determined more work was needed. As a result, DFO graphic designer Jeremy Heighton took on the project.

Over the following nine months, while many more partners and supporters added their help and provided funding, numerous drafts were created for review and improvement. Silvatech continued to provide invaluable assistance, as it was necessary to create a layer that showed all the wetlands larger than 10 hectares. As well, Silvatech created another map of the Shuswap that shows all the major sub-drainages larger than 20,000 hectares. In total, there are 12 of these drainages that range from the 21,000 ha Wap Creek watershed that drains from the north into Mabel Lake to the 440,000 ha Shuswap River watershed.

To understand the extent of the watershed, one must visualize the boundaries. The perimeter follows the height of land that extends north from Chase past the west side of Skmana Lake to around the Sinmax Creek drainage and then all the way north to far above Tum Tum Lake where it forms the northern tip. From here, the perimeter follows

mountain-top ridge glaciers southeast all the way to just east of Three-Valley Gap and then farther south along the edge of Monashee Provincial Park. It crosses Highway 6 east of Cherryville and finally heads to the west crossing through the top of Graystokes Provincial Park and heads north again just to the west of Aberdeen Lake.

The watershed boundary slices through Coldstream between Vernon and Lumby. At this point the height of land is barely discernable in this mostly level agricultural area. Heading north, the perimeter cuts through Silver Star Provincial Park, leaving many of the ski runs in the Shuswap! One of the most confusing boundaries between the Shuswap and the Okanagan is right next to Armstrong, where Fortune Creek runs along the highway to the Shuswap River. From here the perimeter continues to head north where it circles the Deep Creek drainage and then follows the height of land around the Salmon River drainage almost as far west as Douglas Lake, before it heads back to Chase.

Although logging roads permeate most of the Shuswap, it would not be possible to drive around the perimeter. There are many areas where mountains restrict road building, especially the high divide between Greenbush Lake, at the headwaters of the Shuswap River and Three-Valley Gap. Also, there are no connecting roads between the Adams River and the Seymour River. The Shuswap is actually blessed with an astounding amount of wilderness. While some wilderness is protected in parks, most of it exists because it is either too high in elevation or otherwise not suitable for logging.

With the poster now printed and available, the project continues with the development of a resource guide, numerous educational activities and plans for a full week of events in April. See www.shuswapwatershed.ca for more information.